

## RUSSIA AND THE FUTURE EXPANSION OF NATO

BY

COLONEL RADEK CERNY  
Czech Army

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U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

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**RUSSIA AND THE FUTURE EXPANSION OF NATO**

by

Colonel Radek Cerny  
Czech Army

Colonel Deborah Hanagan  
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013



## **ABSTRACT**

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This Strategy Research Project (SRP) examines Russia's position on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization up to now and the possible influence that Russia could have on further prospective expansion in Europe in the near future, especially to the East. Even though Russia has opposed expansion of NATO with varied intensity since the early 1990s, it has not stopped this process. On the other hand, Russia is focused on building gradually its international position and power again. From the point of view of some member and candidate countries, Russia still poses a security threat to them. But, pursuing further expansion of NATO closer to Russia's borders without addressing Russian concerns could compromise current NATO-Russia relations. This SRP addresses the political and security challenges that such conditions pose for NATO-Russia relations, candidate countries, and also member countries. Despite episodic disputes between NATO and Russia, the removal of mutual suspicion through further development of cooperation and understanding as close as possible based on common global security interests is desirable. The SRP concludes considering Russia's NATO membership in the long-term future.





## RUSSIA AND THE FUTURE EXPANSION OF NATO

I believe that . . . we should develop a true strategic partnership with Russia. We should extend practical cooperation in areas where we share security interests. It is obvious that there will be fundamental issues on which we disagree. We have to insist, for example, that Russia fully complies with its international obligations, including respecting the territorial integrity and political freedom of its neighbors. But we cannot let those areas of disagreement poison the whole relationship.<sup>1</sup>

---Anders Fogh Rasmussen  
NATO Secretary General

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established to provide security in the Euro-Atlantic area. Since its foundation to the end of the Cold War, it counterbalanced the military power of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Treaty.<sup>2</sup> Despite an escalated and nearly boundless arms race at the time, Europe experienced one of the most peaceful periods in its history.<sup>3</sup> After democratic revolutions within the countries belonging to the former Soviet bloc, the Warsaw Treaty dissolution, and the Soviet Union break up, there were speculations related to the further role, or even existence, of NATO. The organization reacted to this series of radical events and adapted itself to the changed environment. It became the most significant pillar of European security and stability and, even quite promptly, set conditions for the admission of former Soviet bloc countries as its new members.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently, a weakened Russia also became accustomed to its new role without satellite countries and with less power; it was able to oppose NATO enlargement closer to its borders through occasional objections only. However, it would be exaggerated to suggest that Russia has lost its former powerful position completely. Recently, it has become an influential world player who does not hesitate to demand that others take

into account Russia's views or even to affect their further steps. It does not mean for NATO and candidate countries necessarily that Russia should have the ability to veto policies of other sovereign countries. Nevertheless, it is desirable to not ignore an increasingly assertive Russia, to take into account its positions, and to build closer cooperation based on common interests. Russia has its own foreign policies, it is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, it has significant strategic conventional and nuclear weapons capabilities and last, but not least, it could negatively influence European energy security and stability.<sup>5</sup> In addition, under these circumstances, Russia rejects further NATO enlargement strongly and loudly, especially to the East.

This paper examines Russia's position on the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization up to now and the possible influence that Russia could have on further prospective expansion in Europe in the near future, especially to the East. Even though Russia has opposed expansion of NATO with varied intensity since the early 1990s, it has not stopped this process. On the other hand, Russia is focused on building gradually its international position and power again. From the point of view of some member and candidate countries, Russia still poses a security threat to them. But, pursuing further expansion of NATO closer to Russia's borders without addressing Russian concerns could compromise current NATO-Russia relations. The paper addresses the political and security challenges that such conditions pose for NATO-Russia relations, candidate countries, and also member countries. Despite episodic disputes between NATO and Russia, the removal of mutual suspicion through further development of cooperation and understanding as close as possible based on common

global security interests is desirable. The paper concludes considering Russia's NATO membership in the long-term future.

### Role of NATO

After World War II, Western and Eastern Europe were separated ideologically, politically, and militarily. While Western Europe was stabilized through the Marshall Plan launched in March 1948, Eastern Europe fell into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union and rejected this reconstruction plan offered to all European countries which, consequently, resulted in a definitive division between East and West.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after Czechoslovakia became the last satellite country of the Soviet Union through a Communist coup d'état in February 1948, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, France and the United Kingdom signed the Treaty of Brussels in March 1948. This treaty and the Soviet blockade of Berlin resulted in the creation of the Western European Union's Defense Organization in September 1948 which consequently contributed to the creation of NATO.<sup>7</sup>

In April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed by the five original Treaty of Brussels states, as well as the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland. The United States played a critical role in European integration and security, in particular through a newly built military alliance; participation of the United States was considered necessary to counter the military power of the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> The admission of West Germany into NATO on May 9, 1955 was described as "a decisive turning point in the history of our continent" by Halvard Lange, Foreign Minister of Norway at that time;<sup>9</sup> ten years after World War II, defeated (West) German troops were needed to help the alliance resist a feared Soviet invasion.<sup>10</sup> The foundation

of the Warsaw Pact, signed by the Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and East Germany on May 14, 1955, was considered an immediate Soviet formal response to Germany's entry into NATO and definitely demarcated the two opposing sides of the Cold War. The Soviet Union proclaimed that the membership of West Germany in NATO created a threat to Soviet interests.<sup>11</sup>

Since its beginning, NATO was built as a security organization with its primary role to collectively deter and defend against any threat of aggression against any of its member countries. During the Cold War, the role and purpose of NATO were clearly defined by the existence of the threat posed by the Warsaw Pact led by the Soviet Union. Through NATO, both Western European and Northern American countries jointly defended their independence and achieved a very high level of stability.

In 1989, the Soviet Union lost its satellite countries in revolutions throughout Central and Eastern Europe, followed by the unification of Germany in 1990. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved formally on July 1, 1991. Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush signed the Soviet Union–United States Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) at their summit in Moscow in July 1991, decisively marking the end of the Cold War. The tension and self-determination tendencies of states within the Soviet Union led to its dissolution on December 25, 1991. Subsequently, Russia lost the superpower status that it had won in World War II and during the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War left the United States in a dominant position as a military actor and the post-Soviet countries in a security vacuum. NATO responded to these breakthrough events as early as at its summit in London in 1990. The summit is considered the beginning of the transformation of the Cold War NATO. The London

Declaration outlined proposals for developing cooperation with former adversaries and offered them, including the Soviet Union, the establishment of regular diplomatic and military relations with NATO.<sup>12</sup> The NATO Strategic Concepts of 1991 and 1999 emphasized the role of the alliance in expanding the zone of peaceful and friendly relations throughout the entire Euro–Atlantic region.

But, in the beginning of the 1990s, Central European countries were still skeptical of the willingness of Western democracies to integrate them into the Euro-Atlantic security structure. Moreover, Russia's 'Near Abroad' policy and failed coup in Russia in 1993 provoked their pessimism about Russia's further democratic development.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the NATO Summit in Brussels in 1994, post-Cold War Central and Eastern European countries were offered political and military cooperation with NATO through the "Partnership for Peace" program (PfP). The program, operating to date, is designed to help those interested in full-fledged NATO membership implement necessary reforms.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the alliance introduced its *Study on NATO Enlargement* in 1995. This study presented general membership criteria for the first time.<sup>15</sup> It stated: an aspiring partner must be a European country; it must resource its military sufficiently to be able to fulfill membership requirements and contribute to NATO's defense and missions, not only by manpower and equipment but also funds; show willingness to settle international and territorial disputes peacefully; commit to the rule of law and human rights interests; keep all sensitive information secure; its domestic legislation must be compatible with cooperation in NATO; it must maintain a free market economy; and, its military must be controlled by a democratic government. Eventually, membership

accession is subject to the consensus of all member countries. Since membership criteria were introduced, twelve countries participating in the PfP were meeting them at the time of entering the alliance in waves in 1999, 2004, and 2009. To date, twenty-eight countries have become NATO members.<sup>16</sup>

Countries still continue to face security threats and challenges worldwide. Over the last two decades, no region of the world has been untouched by armed conflicts. The outbreak of conflict in the Balkans in the 1990's reminded Europe that wars have not disappeared from life. Moreover, the events of September 11, 2001, have urged other non-NATO countries to think about how to ensure their security and stability. These and other conflicts as well as humanitarian crises have resulted in the extension of NATO's scope of actions: to peace building, peacekeeping, stabilization and humanitarian assistance operations. In fact, by activating Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the first time in its history, NATO has expanded its territorial defense mission into a determination to engage threats posed to alliance members from anywhere outside the Euro-Atlantic zone.<sup>17</sup>

According to the new NATO Strategic Concept 2010, an official document that outlines NATO's approach to security, adopted at the summit in Lisbon, Portugal in November 2010, "NATO's fundamental and enduring purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means." Moreover, "today, the Alliance remains an essential source of stability in an unpredictable world."<sup>18</sup>

### NATO-Russia Relations

NATO-Russia relations formally began in 1991, when Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997)

which was created to foster transparency and dialogue with the countries after the end of the Cold War. In 1994, Russia joined the Partnership for Peace program.<sup>19</sup>

In the *Study on NATO Enlargement*, the alliance addressed Russia's concerns with respect to the enlargement process. The study explicitly expressed NATO's interest "in developing wider relationship with Russia" and it also made clear that the enlargement process "will threaten no one."<sup>20</sup>

In 1997, NATO and Russia placed their cooperation on a more formal basis through the NATO-Russia Founding Act which laid the foundations for their future relationships. The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) was established as a means to facilitate regular consultations and discussions of security matters. However, lingering Cold War prejudices prevented the PJC from achieving its potential. Moreover, disagreements about the Kosovo campaign impacted relations.<sup>21</sup>

In 2002, NATO countries and Russia formed a deeper and closer relationship with the creation of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which replaced the Permanent Joint Council. This was expected to involve much more than a change of name and to place the relationship on an entirely new basis. The new forum, in which all countries participate as equals, is chaired by the NATO Secretary General. But, it seems both Russia and NATO had asymmetric expectations. Russia did not feel equal among others and the NRC, instead of becoming an effective instrument of mutual security interaction, has turned into "a mostly extremely narrow technical workshop-useful, but extremely narrow in scope."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, at the time of the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, NATO suspended the formal work in the NATO-Russia Council.<sup>23</sup>

Plans for deploying a missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland, the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, and other more or less serious disputes and events, including Western support to revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, can be accounted for mutual NATO-Russia mistrust and misperceptions.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Russia viewed missile defense in Central Europe as a violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, according to which NATO promised to refrain from stationing substantial combat forces in its new member countries.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Russia warned it could deploy its missiles in Kaliningrad to target intended missile defense sites.<sup>26</sup> Recently, NATO expressed that it “will actively seek cooperation on missile defense with Russia.”<sup>27</sup>

Russia and NATO took a decision to restart NRC formal meetings and practical cooperation in 2009; the first formal ministerial-level meeting of the NRC since the Georgia crisis took place in December 2009. Ministers agreed to improve the working methods of the NRC itself, to make it more result-oriented and politically relevant.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the alliance is determined “to use the full potential of the NATO-Russia Council for dialogue and joint action with Russia.”<sup>29</sup>

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2020 stresses Russia’s persistent opposition to any future enlargement of NATO to Russian borders and plans to unilaterally form global missile defense. The plans to build missile defense systems in Central Europe are criticized as well as attempts to give NATO global functions and disproportionally design current global and regional security architecture in its favor. At the same time, it expresses Russia’s readiness to negotiate and develop relations with NATO on the condition of equality and respect for Russia’s interests. Contrary to expectations based on the anti-Western rhetoric frequently used



by the Russian leadership in recent years, the United States and NATO are not explicitly mentioned in the document as a security concern.<sup>30</sup> That can be perceived positively as broadening opportunities for mutual NATO-Russia cooperation. However, among threats to military security are included “the policies of an array of leading foreign countries aimed at achieving overwhelming supremacy in the military sphere, above all in strategic nuclear forces,” which could indicate that authors of the strategy were preoccupied with the United States.<sup>31</sup>

The NATO Strategic Concept 2010 goes clearly towards mutual understanding with Russia and argues against any doubts. As stated in this document, NATO-Russia cooperation has “strategic importance.” NATO explicitly stresses that it “poses no threat to Russia” and seeks “a true strategic partnership ... with the expectation of reciprocity from Russia.”<sup>32</sup>

#### Russia’s Position on Membership Waves in 1999, 2004, and 2009

After openly considering its own NATO membership in 1991, Russia changed its mind in 1993. Further, Russia has opposed the process of NATO enlargement since this idea emerged in 1994. Even as Russia was being repeatedly assured that NATO enlargement is not in any case aimed to threaten it, the Russian position was negative. The Russian foreign policy after 1993 emphasized the strengthening of military and economic ties in the “near abroad,” thus focused on reestablishing its former sphere of influence. Germany and the United States played a significant role in shaping a solution. In 1997, Russia agreed to one round of NATO enlargement in exchange for a special NATO-Russia security charter. A Russian veto requirement on enlargement was refused. Eventually, when offered the NATO-Russia Founding Act and being assured

that NATO will not station any nuclear weapons on the territory of its new members, Russia accepted that the new members (Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) would be fully integrated into the NATO military structure in 1999.<sup>33</sup>

Immediately after the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) announced their desire to join NATO, Russia started with its threatening policy clearly and openly. Russian press reported that if Baltic countries became part of NATO, Russia would “turn to military steps.” There were even reports stating that Russia would preemptively intervene in the Baltic countries and station nuclear weapons as close to the new NATO borders as possible.<sup>34</sup> After Vladimir Putin was elected Russian President, the strong opposition started to weaken. Mr. Putin even stated at the Bush-Putin summit in Bled, Slovenia, in June 2001 that he did not intend to let enlargement undermine the potential for U.S.-Russia cooperation. Later in the summer, Putin took a further step toward acknowledging the inevitability of enlargement by expressing the view that Russia might itself want to join NATO, as an alternative to his preferred option of seeing NATO disappear. As Russian-American cooperation on terrorism was developing, Mr. Putin said that if NATO were to continue “becoming more political than military,” Russia might reconsider its opposition to enlargement.<sup>35</sup> In 2002, NATO-Russia relations further improved when the NATO-Russia Council was established.

In addition, Russia did not express any objections to the prospective NATO membership of Balkan countries (Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia) as well as Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. Among others, reasons might be that Russia’s potential influence on Balkan countries united in the former Yugoslavia was almost negligible. These countries (the former Yugoslavia) did not join the Warsaw Pact in the past and

kept “a distance” from the Soviet sphere of influence. Romania showed limited Russian influence in the past as well when refusing to take part in the Warsaw Pact invasion into the former Czechoslovakia in 1968.

#### Candidate Countries Context

NATO remains the key attractive Euro-Atlantic security structure and has extended its security reach through its expansion; it is also expected that this process will continue in the future. The NATO Strategic Concept 2010 restates the alliance’s “commitment to keep the door to NATO open to all European democracies that meet the standards of membership.”<sup>36</sup>

In 1999, NATO launched its Membership Action Plan (MAP) as a program of advice, assistance and practical support tailored to the individual needs of countries wishing to join the alliance.<sup>37</sup> The program was established on the experience gained during the accession process of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, which had joined NATO in the first post-Cold War round of enlargement in 1999. Participation in this program helped prepare Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia all of which joined NATO in 2004, as well as Albania and Croatia which joined in 2009.

Potential new members of the alliance include five countries. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been participating in the MAP since 1999 and Montenegro was invited to join the program in 2009. NATO informed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2010 it would receive a formal invitation to join under the condition it makes necessary progress in its reform efforts.<sup>38</sup> Macedonia was even under consideration to enter NATO in 2009, but the name dispute with Greece is holding up its

admission.<sup>39</sup> At its summit in Bucharest, Romania in 2008, the alliance, through the Summit Declaration, welcomed Ukraine's and Georgia's aspirations for membership in NATO and explicitly stated that these countries "will become members of NATO."<sup>40</sup>

Similarly to Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia, there are not expected any potential objections from Russia regarding membership in NATO of the other Balkan countries. According to the Bucharest Summit Declaration, Macedonia can become a member of NATO as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached with Greece, while Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina could expect an invitation after successfully participating in the MAP and meeting membership criteria.

On the other hand, Russia opposes strongly further NATO expansion to the East, perceiving it as a threat to its national interests. This applies to the potential membership of Georgia and Ukraine. From the Russian perspective, during the 1990s and early 2000s, NATO exploited temporary Russian weaknesses and frustration caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union in favor of NATO enlargements in 1999 and 2004. At that time, three Central European countries and the Baltic countries became members of NATO. However, NATO insists that every country in Europe has the right to apply for alliance membership.

NATO-Georgia relations are currently driven by Georgia's participation in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC)<sup>41</sup> and its involvement in Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs).<sup>42</sup> The process of seeking closer ties with NATO brought Georgia on a collision course with Russia. In the spring of 2006, Russia imposed economic sanctions on Georgia. Later that year, Georgia accused four Russians of espionage. Russia responded by recalling its ambassador and also started military provocations

against Georgian military installations, including an alleged attack against the Georgian radar. The conflict was finally settled at the end of 2006 and during 2007. However, at the beginning of 2008, Russia issued a warning to Georgia not to seek NATO membership or Russian-Georgian relations could be destabilized again.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the Georgia-Russia war in 2008, followed by Russia's military deployments into the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, within Georgia's internationally recognized borders, and the NATO Partnership for Peace exercise in Georgia in 2009, made the South Caucasus a hot spot in NATO-Russia relations.

The Georgian government and population strongly support efforts to join NATO. However, admission of Georgia according to Georgia's internationally recognized borders would put NATO in danger of a direct conflict with Russia which has maintained its regular forces in the separatist provinces within Georgia since the end of the war. In 2008, scholars Ariel Cohen<sup>44</sup> and Janusz Bugajski<sup>45</sup> stated that Russian actions in Georgia also sent a warning to neighboring countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova, in order to discourage their aspirations for NATO membership.<sup>46</sup> After the conflict, NATO denounced the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia, and suspended its cooperation with Russia.

Since NATO accession is a matter of consensus among all alliance members, Georgia is in a difficult situation as a result of its armed conflict with Russia. Moreover, any solution will probably have to involve Russia. It is predictable that Russia will not hurry to withdraw its forces from Georgia. Unresolved latent conflicts could also serve as a good argument for countries with strong economic and energy interests in Russia, like Germany and France, to oppose Georgia's alliance membership in the near future.<sup>47</sup>

NATO-Ukraine relations are currently determined by Ukraine's participation in the EAPC.<sup>48</sup> NATO membership was pursued by the former pro-Western president Viktor Yushchenko<sup>49</sup> and supported by the United States, United Kingdom, and Eastern European member countries.<sup>50</sup> However, the Ukrainian population faces a dilemma concerning joining NATO. According to the results of a poll conducted in Ukraine in 2005, only about 16 percent of the Ukrainian population would agree with the country's NATO membership.<sup>51</sup> It was also perceived that admission of Ukraine could reignite separatism in Crimea, an area populated by a Russian minority, and make Russia's interference inevitable. This would be in accordance with the Russian National Security Strategy in which Russia stated its determination to enforce the rights of the Russian population anywhere in the world that it becomes necessary. Russia showed such an approach in the past in both Georgia and Moldova.

Along with the effort to integrate the country into NATO and European Union structures, pushed forward by former President Yushchenko, Ukraine has tried to combine its integration with cooperation with Russia. This has been especially important since Russia started to reassess its preferential economic relationship and system of subsidies provided to Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Ukraine has repeatedly faced disputes with Russia over natural gas which also affected the energy balance of European consumers.<sup>52</sup>

In 2010, Ukraine abandoned its aim to join the alliance. Viktor Yanukovich, the country's new president, has moved Ukraine closer to Russia in several policy areas. Shortly after his statement that Ukraine's membership into NATO was not a goal anymore, he reached agreement with the Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, on

natural gas prices and on extending the lease of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol, Ukraine until 2042.<sup>53</sup>

To conclude the analysis of the context of candidate countries, it is appropriate to study the case of the Republic of Moldova. Moldova became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1992 and has participated in the NATO PfP program since 1994. Moldova even signed the bilateral IPAP with NATO in 2006. Some Moldavian analysts believe that Moldova's security interests should be linked to the country's integration into the European Union and NATO structures and that the policy of neutrality which Moldova adopted in 1995 should be abandoned. The integration of Moldova into these institutions is viewed as promoting internal stability, democracy, prosperity, and security of the country. On the other hand, a Communist government (2001-2005) questioned this direction, the country's information sector is still under the control of Russian media, and Russia has deployed forces in the separatist Transnistrian area of the Republic of Moldova since 1992.<sup>54</sup>

In 2008, the Moldavian president announced in an interview with the Russian newspaper Kommersant that Moldova is prepared to come up with a final solution regarding the Transnistrian dispute. In exchange for Moldova's officially declared neutrality, Russia would withdraw its troops from the Transnistrian region where about one third of the population is Russian.<sup>55</sup> In principle, such an agreement between Moldova and Russia would make it impossible for Moldova to join NATO in the future, which Russia would welcome.

In general, unresolved and interlinked territorial disputes in the Caucasus, and a "more nationalist and more self-confident" Russia, at least in this region, make it likely

that NATO enlargement in this direction will be postponed into the long term future. Moreover, the more NATO enlargement approaches Russian borders, the more the internal alliance division over perceptions of Russia as either a threat or a partner will inhibit consensus on future accessions.<sup>56</sup>

### NATO-Russia Partnership

Through its Strategic Concept 2010, NATO encourages Russia to build a mutual strategic partnership based on shared interests. NATO and Russia share more security concerns today than at any point since the end of the Cold War. NATO remains convinced that the security of the alliance and Russia is “intertwined and that a strong and constructive partnership based on mutual confidence, transparency and predictability best serves [our] security.” The alliance would like to consult and cooperate with Russia in such areas as slowing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, “missile defense, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, counter-piracy and the promotion of wider international security.”<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of their complicated historical relations and differences concerning NATO’s enlargement, both Russia and NATO have proven that they can cooperate successfully. For instance, as a PfP program result, Russia deployed a contingent to the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996. Further, despite differences over the Kosovo air campaign, Russia played a notable diplomatic role in resolving the Kosovo crisis and also deployed peacekeepers to support the Kosovo force in June 1999. The mutual cooperation was intensified after the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 and in Russia in 2004. In 2006, Russia deployed its first frigate to the Mediterranean to support Operation Active Endeavour.<sup>58</sup> In 2008, Russia



offered transit to ISAF contributors in support of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan. In the meantime, Russia hosted several exercises on its territory.<sup>59</sup>

The NATO Secretary General has identified relations with Russia as his top priority after Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> Recently, Russia expressed its readiness to negotiate and develop relations with NATO on the condition of equality and respect for Russia's interests.<sup>61</sup> In addition, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen said at the NATO Summit in Lisbon that Russia and NATO agreed on shared security challenges and, moreover, that Russia and NATO "pose no threat to each other." He referred to this moment as "a clear line between the past and the future of NATO-Russia relations."<sup>62</sup>

It is desirable that NATO and Russia engage with each other more seriously now and into the future. Building mutual NATO-Russia understanding through development of their close cooperative relations should transform their relationship from mutual suspicion and occasional crises into a serious long-term partnership. At this time, close partnership seems to be the best way of including and involving Russia in solving European and Euro-Atlantic security challenges.

A close NATO-Russia partnership ensures a long term and cooperative approach for addressing common areas of interest. At least partly, NATO could benefit from compliance with Russia and from the political influence and military means that Russia has at its disposal to face common security threats within the Euro-Atlantic region. The long term benefits from this cooperative approach appear to greatly outweigh short term concerns of any kind on both sides.

#### Considering Russia's Membership in NATO

NATO enlargement could even include Russia itself. From the long term perspective, the potential NATO membership of Russia cannot be ruled out. Even historically, the former Soviet Union suggested in March 1954 that it should join NATO to preserve peace in Europe. In May 1954, the NATO countries, fearing that the Soviet Union's major stimulus was to weaken the alliance and to reduce the buildup of NATO forces in Europe, ultimately rejected this proposal.<sup>63</sup>

The North Atlantic Treaty contains no obstacles to Russian membership. By unanimous resolution, the parties to the treaty can invite any other European country to apply for membership. That country should demonstrate its capability to promote the basic principles of the organization and contribute to Euro-Atlantic security.

It would take time before Russia fully satisfies NATO membership criteria; in the past, however, the prospect of membership has always driven a process in candidate countries that has eventually promoted necessary reforms and led to a consensus of values. Nevertheless, at the moment, this approach seems to be very challenging. The evolution of mutual NATO-Russia relations has been full of mistrust and misperceptions that are not overcome yet. First of all, confidence must be restored by building a credible NATO-Russia partnership in upcoming years through broad cooperation and shared interests.

It seems likely that no decision on Russia's potential NATO membership will be made by either NATO or Russia in the near future. Nevertheless, it is essential to design a strategy that would help build trust, understanding, and a willingness to solve problems together. But, neither NATO countries, nor Russia currently see Russian membership as a priority.<sup>64</sup> However, a debate has already started among experts and

both advocates and opponents have brought their arguments. In addition, a recent poll carried out by the Pew Research Center found that 40% of Russia's population had a favorable view of NATO, compared with only 24% in 2009.<sup>65</sup>

For many reasons, an option of Russia's NATO admission should be kept open. NATO is the only forum in which North America, Europe, and Russia can discuss security interests at one table. Recently, there have been security challenges in which NATO and Russia were able to cooperate. There are also indicators that Russia feels isolated. While commenting on the admission of Central European countries, the Russian president stated that almost all European countries have found their place in Europe, except Russia. In addition, after all the changes in the European order in the last two decades, it would be logical to complete the integration of Russia into the new order by bringing it into the Euro-Atlantic security framework. Of course, in turn, Russia would have to accept the rights and obligations common to other NATO countries.<sup>66</sup>

To be honest, the approach advocating bringing Russia into the alliance appears to be also inconsistent to some new NATO countries. For historical reasons, Central European, Eastern European, and Baltic countries were driven to NATO due to their perception of being threatened by Russia, even after the Cold War ended. At the present time, admission of Russia could concurrently worsen relations within the alliance, especially between traditional members and new member countries.

There are already concerns about maintaining the cohesion of the alliance with regards to Russia. Some NATO countries are pursuing bilateral relations outside the normal scope of NATO-Russia relations and this is causing tension within the alliance. Recently, Norway announced its intention to deepen its political relationship and

defense cooperation with Russia.<sup>67</sup> France sold its technologically advanced Mistral warships to Russia and it is also heavily involved in both the North and South Stream pipelines.<sup>68</sup> The German-Russian North Stream gas pipeline project has raised concerns in countries that will be bypassed by it.<sup>69</sup> European energy security and the use by Russia of its energy resources as leverage to influence the policies of European states has led to divisions in NATO.<sup>70</sup> According to the above, it is clear that NATO lacks internal consensus on how to approach Russia.

But, there are also advantages to Russian membership in NATO. Once obstacles to Russia's membership are overcome, the country would be integrated definitely into the Euro-Atlantic security structure; it would also make it easier to include Georgia, and perhaps other countries neighboring Russia, into NATO. Further, it would remove any perception of a supposed threat to Russia by NATO. In addition, the alliance would fully benefit from the political and military capabilities Russia has at its disposal.<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

NATO remains the pivotal Euro-Atlantic security structure and has extended its security reach through its expansion. To date, NATO has largely succeeded in its enlargement efforts. The prospect of membership promoted political, social, economic, and military reforms in aspiring countries and, consequently, has enhanced democracy. The new NATO members interpreted their membership mostly as an assurance of their free and democratic national existence, which increased their independence, prestige, and credibility. Moreover, Central and Eastern European members felt that their integration in the former Soviet sphere of influence was formally ended. NATO is

perceived as a stabilizing factor needed for democratic development and the security of its members, and it is also attractive to countries seeking potential NATO membership.

Since its foundation, NATO admitted new members in six waves, including three post-Cold War rounds, and it currently has 28 members. In its last strategic concept, NATO expressed its determination to continue the enlargement process. To date, Russia has not been able to influence significantly the NATO enlargement process or even stop it. The evolution of NATO-Russia relations has been accompanied by a series of more or less serious disputes over the role of NATO and NATO enlargement. Nevertheless, increased mutual communication and some common security interests have always brought both NATO and Russia back together.

However, some significant and precarious phenomena have been observed recently. Russia included in its national security strategy a passage authorizing the enforcement of the rights of Russian populations anywhere in the world. Such words were used to cover Russia's intervention in Georgia after Georgia's security forces were deployed to the separatist provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008. Moreover, Russia is in no hurry to withdraw its forces from Georgia. Russia also maintains forces in the Transnistrian region within Moldova. While Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have attempted to deepen their ties with NATO, they also have significant Russian minority populations. Some observers argued that Russia sent a warning to neighboring countries seeking closer relations with NATO by intervening in Georgia.

Russia's mistrust and misperception toward NATO should be eliminated by building a mutual partnership based on common interests. NATO Strategic Concept 2010 makes clear that the alliance is determined to promote such a partnership.

Emphasizing equality in relations, the Russian security strategy also states Russia's readiness to cooperate with NATO. It is very much in the interests of all the countries in the Euro-Atlantic region that NATO and Russia demonstrate their long term mutual commitment to face common security challenges.

The potential NATO membership status of Russia cannot be ruled out over the long term. Russia's admission to NATO would eliminate the perception of NATO as a threat in Russian eyes and integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security structure. NATO remains open to all European countries that meet membership criteria. But, concerns about Russia's credibility, its real intentions, European energy security, and the closer bilateral relations of some NATO countries with Russia and their impact on alliance cohesion would have to be addressed in advance.

### Endnotes

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<sup>11</sup> The Warsaw Pact [Excerpted from “Czechoslovakia: Country Study,” Glenn E. Curtis, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1992)], [http://www.shsu.edu/~his\\_ncp/WarPact.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/WarPact.html) (accessed January 7, 2011).

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Simon, *NATO Enlargement and Central Europe: A Study in Civil-Military Relations*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University (Washington, D.C.: NDU Press, 1996), 9. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to refer to its neighboring countries – the former Soviet republics and, at times, other Eastern European countries formerly under Soviet influences – as the “near abroad.” The term implies a special relationship with Russia, though the kind of special has varied by specific country or region.

<sup>14</sup> The Partnership for Peace (PfP) program was established in 1994 and is based on individual bilateral relations between each partner country and NATO: each country may choose the extent of its participation. The PfP program is considered the operational wing of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership; linked from *The NATO Home Page* at “NATO A-Z,” [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50349.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm) (accessed November 23, 2010).

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<sup>16</sup> Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States (founders); Greece, Turkey (1<sup>st</sup> enlargement in 1952); Germany (2<sup>nd</sup> enlargement in 1955); Spain (3<sup>rd</sup> enlargement in 1982); Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland (4<sup>th</sup> enlargement in 1999); Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia (5<sup>th</sup> enlargement in 2004); Albania, Croatia (6<sup>th</sup> enlargement in 2009); linked from *The NATO Home Page* at “NATO A-Z,” [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_52044.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52044.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed December 5, 2010).

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<sup>20</sup> NATO, *Study on NATO Enlargement*.

<sup>21</sup> NATO, *NATO's Relations with Russia*.

<sup>22</sup> Dmitri Trenin, “NATO and Russia: Partnership or Peril,” *Current History* 108, no. 720 (October, 2009): 299.

<sup>23</sup> NATO, *NATO's Relations with Russia*.

<sup>24</sup> Oksana Antonenko and Bastian Giegerich, “Rebooting NATO-Russia Relations,” *Survival* 51, no. 2 (Summer, 2009): 13, in ProQuest (accessed December 1, 2010).

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<sup>28</sup> NATO, *NATO's Relations with Russia*.

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<sup>44</sup> Dr. Ariel Cohen, Ph.D. is Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Davis International Studies Institute at the Heritage Foundation.

<sup>45</sup> Janusz Bugajski is Director of the New European Democracies Project and Senior Fellow in the Europe Program at Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

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<sup>57</sup> NATO, *Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*.

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